AN ASSESSMENT OF COUNSELOR AND COUNSELOR IN-TRAINING ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE WISCONSIN TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM AND ITS VALUE AS A VIABLE POST-SECONDARY OPTION FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

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An Assessment of Counselor and Counselor In-Training Attitudes and Perceptions of the Wisconsin Technical College System and Its Value as a Viable Post-Secondary Option for High School Students .
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Currently, high school students are faced with more information, more career choices, and more post-secondary options than ever before in history. For many young people, finding the right post-secondary option is a complex and challenging task. Many high school students ignore technical careers in favor of immediate employment after graduation or enroll at a four-year university without considering other alternatives. This further enhances the already severe shortage of technicians in Wisconsin's labor market.

The purpose of this study was to assess counselor and counselor in-training attitudes and perceptions of the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) and its

value as a viable post-secondary option for high school students. Counselors are significant adults in the lives of high school students and part of their job function is to help students with career exploration and decision-making.

The subjects for this study were 36 practicing high school counselors in the Chippewa Valley Technical College district and 20 counselors in-training at the University of Wisconsin – Stout, all of which are located near Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The study utilized a two-page survey, developed by the researcher, to identify perceptions and attitudes toward the Wisconsin Technical College System. The survey consisted of 10 demographic questions and 15 statements about the Wisconsin Technical College System in which the counselor responded on a six point Likert scale. A university statistician calculated descriptive statistics from the responses of the counselors.

Findings suggest that the Wisconsin Technical College System has made positive strides in educating counselors about technical careers and opportunities, and could continue to increase their positive self-image by increasing marketing efforts and maintaining consistent contact with high school counselors through college representatives. Findings also suggest that it is vitally important to continue to reach out to practicing counselors and counselors in-training to create awareness about the Wisconsin Technical College System and to give a greater understanding of all post-secondary options as well as technical careers.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

One of the critical issues facing high school counselors of the 21st century is educating students about post-secondary options and guiding them through career choices and development. Currently, high school students are faced with more information, more career choices, and more post-secondary options than ever before in history. Students deal with the confusion of mixed messages and misinformation based on ideas and myths of a past paradigm.

The philosophy still exists that there is a positive correlation between the amount of education one has and the amount of success one will achieve. However, a shift is taking place. In the world of work many technical careers requiring two years or less of formal education pay more than entry-level professional careers requiring a four-year degree. Yet, some students, teachers, and parents still hesitate to recognize the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) as a viable first choice for post-secondary education. Too many high school students ignore technical careers in favor of immediate employment after graduation or enroll at a four-year university without considering other alternatives. This further enhances the already severe shortage of technicians in the Wisconsin labor market (Department of Workforce Development, 2000).

Wisconsin enters the 21st century in the grip of an unprecedented labor shortage, with the jobless rate sinking to a 30-year low of 3.2 percent in 1999 (Department of Workforce Development, 2000). Unfortunately, our society and the education system have failed to prepare an adequate supply of workers for technical occupations. Too many high school students are pushed toward a four-year degree, without a clear idea of what the labor market has in store, or how to best prepare for jobs that meet their aptitudes and interests (Gray and Herr, 1995). Other students end their formal education upon graduation. As a result, many students who might have achieved maximum economic benefit and personal satisfaction from a technical career never receive the appropriate training. High school students require more timely and practical information on technical careers, more hands-on experiences with the technology that drives those occupations, and an increased awareness about the training required to have a technical career.

The residents of Wisconsin have always recognized the value of education and the role it plays in preparation for work, which has resulted in countless post-secondary options. The structure of the post-secondary options for high school students in the state of Wisconsin is complex and detailed and can often leave students confused and uncertain of the "best" fit for them. For example, in Wisconsin students have the option of entering private or public institutions. In the public arena, students can enter the Wisconsin Technical College System or the University of Wisconsin System.

With all these educational options, a question of importance is who is training and guiding high school students through the transition from high school to post-secondary education or into the world of work? Parents, teachers, siblings, friends, and guidance counselors are among those who have strong influence on students. In the Wisconsin educational system, the guidance counselor has been trained and educated to help high school students with academic, personal, and career choices consisting of post-secondary options and entry into the world of work. Licensed school counselors are trained at a Master's degree level to help students deal with these complex career development and decision-making issues.

The purpose of this study is to examine counselor and counselor in-training attitudes and perceptions of the Wisconsin Technical College System and its value as a post-secondary option for high school students. Hopefully the study will provide insight into more appropriate school counselor roles in guiding students toward WTCS career options.

Definition of Terms

For clarity and understanding of this study, several terms need to be defined.

Associate Degree: Applied Science or Applied Arts degree consisting of 64-72 semester credits designed to provide a person with the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to function at a technician or mid-management level.

Technical diploma: A combination of courses totaling 2 to 68 credits which are designed to provide a person with the knowledge, attitude, and skills necessary to function as an entry-level technician.

Technical Certificate: This certificate is intended to provide job preparation and/or provide skills needed for a job upgrade.

At-risk families – Families with children who are not likely to do well in school.

College Parallel: Courses similar to those offered by a four-year college or university during the typical freshman or sophomore year; may be liberal arts or pre-professional courses. These courses are usually offered for the specific purpose of transfer to a baccalaureate program, but many fulfill the general education requirement in occupational programs.

Articulation: Cooperation and coordination between educational systems. Provides for a smooth transition of a student moving from one educational level to the next, and reduces unnecessary duplication.

Tech Prep: The cooperation among PK-12 schools, technical colleges, universities, business, labor, and the community to develop applied and integrated technical and academic curriculum. This curriculum provides a coherent sequence of courses and experiences designed to provide high school graduates with more technical and academic competence leading toward the goal of successful transition from school to post-secondary education and/or work.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Introduction

Post-secondary options for a career choice have always been popular with researchers and have resulted in extensive research in this area. For the purpose of this literature review, the focus is on three main areas: 1) An examination of the public post-secondary options available in Wisconsin focusing on an overview of the Wisconsin Technical College System and the University of Wisconsin System; 2) Labor market demands and employment opportunities in Wisconsin in the 21st Century; 3) The role of the school guidance counselor in student's choices of post-secondary options.

Public Post-Secondary Options for Wisconsin High School Students

The residents of Wisconsin have always recognized the value of education and the role it plays in preparation for work, which has resulted in countless post-secondary options for students. However, the structure of post-secondary options for high school students in the state of Wisconsin is complex and detailed and can often leave students confused and uncertain of the "best" fit for them. Students graduating from high school have many different post-secondary options they can pursue including immediate employment, attending private colleges and universities, entering into apprenticeship programs, or entering into the public school systems. Although students have many options, for the purpose of this study, we will be focusing on the public school post-

secondary system including the Wisconsin Technical College System and the University of Wisconsin System.

The Wisconsin Technical College System

As State Director and Executive Officer of the WTCS, Edward Chin (1999) stated in his article titled "Wisconsin," the WTCS provides occupational education below the baccalaureate level, including associate degrees, technical diplomas, certificates, apprenticeship training, and adult education below the professional level. The WTCS seeks to provide occupational opportunities to high school age students and facilitate their transition to post-secondary education; increase employability skills of new labor entrants, re-entrants, and incumbents; facilitate college transfer, and address barriers to full participation in the work force (Chin, 1999). The vision of the WTCS today, reflects the following primary values:

> *"To be the premier provider of technical education. We develop individuals who apply knowledge and skills to enhance quality of life and boost economic vitality. We are committed to extending learning beyond the classroom and throughout life" (Chin, 1999).*

The present day WTCS has 16 districts, 46 outreach campuses, and more than 1,000 outreach centers, many within commuting distance of nearly all of the state's

population. The primary focus of the WTCS is to provide occupationally related technical education. However, three of the WTCS districts do provide liberal arts collegiate transfer programs (Chin, 1999).

In keeping with today's focus of the WTCS, most of the degrees and diplomas awarded by the WTCS focus on occupational education and training and thus prepare students for employment in a specific occupational area. The WTCS offers students a wide variety of programs to choose from including 174 unduplicated associate degrees and 548 associate degree programs statewide (Mahaffey, 1999). The WTCS also offers an additional 112 unduplicated one and two-year technical diploma programs and 51 short-term vocational programs (Mahaffey, 1999). In addition, three technical college districts are authorized by statute to offer a separate college transfer program. This program provides liberal arts instruction leading to an associate of arts degree. The program includes courses equivalent to the college-level that parallel the freshman and sophomore year instruction that would be offered through a conventional community or four-year college liberal arts program (Chin, 1999).

Table 1: Wisconsin Technical College System Program Offerings – October 1998

WTCS Program Offerings - October 1998	
	Approved Programs

	Unduplicated Total	**System Wide Total**
Associate Degree	174	548
Two-year Vocational Diploma	18	56
One-year Vocational Diploma	94	287
Short-term Vocational Diploma	51	152
College Parallel	1	3
Total	338	1046

To understand the WTCS of today, it is helpful to understand where it came from. The birth of the WTCS dates back to 1911 when legislation was passed to provide schooling for students age 14 to 16 who had left high school without a diploma (Lehman, 1984 and Chin, 1999). This education consisted of trade schools, evening school for adults, and schools to provide related instruction for apprenticeships (Chin, 1999 and Paris, 1985). In 1965, through cooperation with Governor Warren Knowles, legislation placed the entire state of Wisconsin into vocational, technical and adult education districts (Chin, 1999 and Lehrman, 1984). This legislation allowed the WTCS to deliver vocational education opportunities to the residents throughout the state.

Over the years, the Wisconsin Technical College System has evolved in a manner parallel to the increase in demand of the skills of Wisconsin's workers. The WTCS of

today has evolved to meet the needs of the state and currently serves over 430,000 students annually (Chin, 1999).

Through the growth and transition over the years, the WTCS has experienced identity changes also. For example, in 1993 the name of the system was changed from District Technical Institute to the Wisconsin Technical College System (Larson, 1999). Along with the name change, the WTCS was also granted permission to grant technical college degrees (Larson, 1999). These changes have enhanced the system's fight against the negative stereotypes and images that surround technical education.

The cost to attend a Wisconsin Technical College is significantly less than a university. Reflecting their origins as continuation schools, adult vocational school courses originally were free of charge in Wisconsin (Lehrman, 1984). Amazingly, in 1975, for the first time, student tuition was charged. Today, there are still no fees for students enrolled in adult high school, adult basic education, or English as a Second Language instruction, and individuals who are age 62 and older are also exempt from program fees for vocational-adult courses (Chin, 1999). The cost per credit to attend a technical college is set each year by the state board. This is a uniform program fee for the system as a whole. For example, the 2000-01 in-state tuition is $61.50 per credit (Chippewa Valley Technical College, 2000).

The Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC) is the technical college located in the area of this study. CVTC is part of the Wisconsin Technical College System and

serves a ten county area. The main campus is located in Eau Claire with major outreach centers in Chippewa Falls, Menomonie, Neillsville and River Falls. In 1998, CVTC reported 26.36 percent of high school graduates enrolling in CVTC directly out of high school and reported a 33.64 percent total for all graduates three years and less out of high school (WTCS, 2000).

University of Wisconsin System

The University of Wisconsin System is a statewide system consisting of: 13 University of Wisconsin Colleges – freshman/sophomore campuses, 13 four-year universities granting bachelors and masters degrees (two of which offer programs through the doctoral level) and the UW-Extension (University of Wisconsin System, 1999). Each institution has a different mission, resulting in differences in student population and degree completion rates.

The University of Wisconsin College campuses, formerly called UW-Centers, focus on delivering liberal arts collegiate transfer programs. The UW Colleges offer a transfer curriculum at freshman/sophomore university instruction level (University of Wisconsin Colleges, 1999). This type of structure allows students to attend small classes and receive personal attention (University of Wisconsin Introduction, 1999). Generally speaking, most students live in or near the community were the UW College campus is located and commute to the campus (University of Wisconsin, 1999). After completing their sophomore year, students generally transfer to a UW system four-year campus.

The UW-Extension was designed and created to serve the needs of the people of Wisconsin and is commonly referred to as the Wisconsin Idea (University of Wisconsin Extension, 1999). This program focuses on educational programs to address the relevant social, economic, environmental and cultural issues of Wisconsin residents. The premise is to educate people where they live and work, with practical applications for their daily lives (University of Wisconsin Extension, 1999). Wisconsin was one of the first states to institutionalize extension education and is nationally acclaimed for the innovative, progressive role of its University in relation to the people of the state (University of Wisconsin Extension, 1999).

The present day system of the University of Wisconsin was created out of the merger of two systems. This merger occurred in 1971, when the University of Wisconsin consisting of campuses at Madison, Milwaukee, Green Bay, and Parkside plus 10 freshman-sophomore centers and UW-Extension combined with the Wisconsin State University System consisting of the Eau Claire, La Crosse, River Falls, Stout, Whitewater, Oshkosh, Platteville, Stevens Point, and Superior campuses plus four freshman-sophomore centers (Bogue and Taylor, 1975).

The history of the University of Wisconsin System dates back to 1848 when the state constitution and the state law created the University of Wisconsin – Madison. The remaining campuses were added to this system as follows: the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee (1956), University of Wisconsin – Green Bay (1969), University of Wisconsin-

Parkside (1969), plus ten freshman-sophomore centers and statewide Extension (Suchman, 1987).

The Wisconsin State University system had its origins in an 1857 state law creating the Board of Regents of Normal Schools (Suchman, 1987). The first of the nine institutions was created in 1866 at Platteville with the last being Eau Claire in 1916 (Suchman, 1987). In 1927, Wisconsin State Universities or the "normal schools" received authority to grant baccalaureate degrees in education. At this time, they were renamed State Teachers Colleges (Suchman, 1987). In 1951, liberal arts programs were added and the name changed to Wisconsin State Colleges and in 1964 the name again changed to Wisconsin State Universities.

The merger of 1971 was followed by the passing of legislation in 1974 that completed the merger process by establishing Chapter 36 of the statutes which is the statutory foundation of the University of Wisconsin System. It consists of 13 universities, a unified Center System with 13 campuses and a statewide extension system (Suchman, 1987). The merged university system is one of the largest such systems in the country (Suchman, 1987).

Labor Market Demands in the 21st Century

Currently, Wisconsin enters the 21st century in an unprecedented labor shortage, with the jobless rate sinking to a 30-year low of 3.2 percent in 1999 (Department of Workforce Development, 2000). When most people think about Wisconsin, they think

Midwest and agriculture. To some extent they are right, but Wisconsin is not agricultural in the same sense that Illinois, Iowa, or Missouri are agricultural (Department of Workforce Development, 2000). In addition, Wisconsin is heavily forested and is very manufacturing oriented. Wisconsin's naturally grown products including agriculture and forestry, need a great deal of manufacturing to bring the products to the market.

In addition, rapid growth in manufacturing, health services, and other segments of the economy has been occurring at the same time that the "baby bust" has sharply reduced the supply of young workers entering the labor market (Department of Workforce Development, 2000). While the labor shortage pervades the economy, it has perhaps been felt most noticeably in technical occupations. Since technicians and other skilled workers form the backbone of the booming manufacturing, health care, and information technologies industries, this presents a major impediment to future economic growth in Wisconsin (Department of Workforce Development, 2000).

Many factors play into the shortage of technicians. First, Wisconsin's labor market is experiencing a continued decline in the number of high school graduates (Department of Workforce Development, 2000). The continued level of decline in the number of high school graduates has employers worried about maintaining a skilled workforce. Second, over one-third of high school students come from at-risk families (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1991). A factor in the increased number of at-risk families is that nearly 80 percent of all Wisconsin females aged 20 to 34 are in the labor force

(Department of Workforce Development, 2000). If the stay at home parent, who has traditionally been the female, is taken from the home, and parenting is an important piece in the education and training of the young, then the family suffers and so does society and the economy (Department of Workforce Development, 2000). Third, our education system has failed to prepare an adequate supply of workers for technical occupations (Gray and Herr, 1995 and Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1991). Nearly 80 percent of Wisconsin's graduating high school students intend to pursue a four-year degree, despite the fact that only 20 percent of the jobs are in the professional area (Gray and Herr, 1995). Despite the existence of numerous high-paying technical career options, at present only 20.7 percent of Wisconsin's high school seniors choose to pursue a technical career through the technical college immediately upon graduation (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1999). Concerns have been raised that the technical college is perceived as a "lesser-than" post-secondary option (Gray and Herr, 1995). Too many high school students are pushed toward a four-year degree, without a clear idea of what the labor market has in store or how to best prepare for jobs that meet their aptitudes and interests, and others end their formal education upon graduation (Gray and Herr, 1995). As a result, many students who might have achieved maximum economic benefit and personal satisfaction from a technical career never receive the appropriate training.

Dale Parnell and Dan Hull (1991) suggest that the majority of the population will never earn a collegiate-level baccalaureate degree. Yet, these students need, want,

and deserve an excellent education, an education that is applicable to their talents and future (Parnell and Hull, 1991). Parnell and Hull (1991) promoted the concept of "Tech Prep." Tech Prep has its roots in secondary/postsecondary articulation in the early 1980s and emerged initially under vocational education reform (Hull and Grevelle, 1998). Tech Prep, which is implemented in all high school districts in the state of Wisconsin, focuses on, but is not limited to, the "neglected majority" which consists of students with average-to-poor academic achievement (Hull and Grevelle, 1998). Tech Prep especially helps the neglected majority, who before Tech Prep, had no plans to attend college or dropped out of school. It helps students early in their high school program, to identify and complete more challenging coursework that they need to succeed in post-secondary education and training. This has resulted in an emphasis on the development of applied and integrated curriculum at the high school level and articulation of these high school courses with technical college occupational programs (Hull and Grevelle, 1998). Tech Prep helps many students see the connection between the information they are being asked to learn and the ways they might use it later in life. A goal of the Tech Prep Program is to increase the number of high school graduates entering the Wisconsin Technical College System directly after high school.

Kenneth Gray and Edwin Herr (1995) state that in 1995 a major paradigm shift was needed to assist transitioning high school students to make healthy career choices.

In 1995, after graduating from high school, 85 percent of graduates planned on obtaining a bachelor's degree and 30 percent had already decided to attend graduate school. More than 70 percent entered directly into four-year colleges or two-year schools designed for transfer into four-year colleges. Less than 1 percent who had taken the college boards planned to pursue anything less than a four-year college degree (Gray and Herr, 1995).

What was needed 50 years ago to be successful is not true in today's labor market. Fifty years ago, 65 percent of the labor market was unskilled labor, 15 percent was skilled labor and 20 percent was professional (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000). Currently, 15 percent of the labor market is unskilled, 65 percent skilled and 20 percent is professional (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000). With 70 percent of students directly entering four-year colleges and two-year transfer schools and only 20 percent of the jobs available in professional areas, many students are not matching job openings in the labor market with education (Gray and Herr, 1995). Therefore, the basic fear/myth is that in the future a four-year degree will be needed to compete for any decent job and that bachelor degree holders will displace those in positions that do not require a four-year degree (Gray and Herr, 1995).

The labor market challenges of the 21st century present some very challenging issues for Wisconsin businesses, including the need for a skilled workforce to allow them

to remain competitive in the world markets. The lack of trained, skilled workers is a big concern for the businesses in Wisconsin. This concern was expressed in 1991 when the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and the Wisconsin Vocational Technical Adult Education formed a joint task force to examine and debate the complex issues surrounding the need to improve the technical preparation of Wisconsin's youth (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1991). The research and the examination of the labor market information clearly indicated the need to better prepare Wisconsin's youth for the technical careers that contribute to the economy and quality of life in Wisconsin.

High School Counselor Role in Student Career Development and Choice for Post-Secondary Options

Career development is a significant component of the educational program of all students. The American School Counselor Association role statement on career development described career guidance as one of the most important contributions school counselors make to the lifelong development of students (Emmett, Fox, and Perrone, 1998). The high school guidance counselor is a significant, trained and educated professional that can influence students' post-secondary choices.

The National Standards for School Counseling Programs prescribed standards for career development, which require the school counseling program to provide the foundation for students to acquire attitudes, knowledge, and skills which enable them

to transition from school to work successfully and from job to job throughout their lives (Emmett et al, 1998). School counselors assist students in understanding the relationship among their personal qualities, future education or training and the world of work. As significant adults in the lives of high school students, school counselors are trained professionals who assist students in discovering and understanding their strengths, weaknesses, goals, values, and help them explore future education, and the opportunities in the world of work.

Counselors guide students to make intelligent career choices. Some modalities of accomplishing this are administering interest inventories and aptitude tests, interpreting the results, and helping students explore various options. Another facet to the position is discussing job markets, college admission requirements, apprenticeship programs, and costs of schools, colleges, or training programs with students. In addition, the newly revised Wisconsin Development Guidance Model: A Resource and Planning guide for School-Community Teams, outlines indicators of career competence at all educational levels for each of the ten major life competencies.

Given all this responsibility, along with many other components of their job, school counselors in Wisconsin were recently criticized in a report submitted to the Wisconsin Executive Cabinet for a Quality Workforce in 1992 for their lack of attention to the career development of their students (Emmett et al., 1998). The report observed that school

counselors are directed to focus much of their time on record keeping, administrative responsibilities, or crisis interventions with students. A study conducted by Judith Emmett, John Fox, and Philip Perrone found that 49 percent of all counselors responding to their survey reported spending time on non-career related demands. Some of these activities were appropriate for counselors and some were for services not specific to the role of the school counselor including: Multidisciplinary Team coordination, Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse initiatives, violence prevention, wellness, peer mediation, 504 plans, and harassment reports (Emmett et al, 1998).

Another factor playing an important role in career development is the Information Age. The Internet has attributed to the ease of access to current information about careers, post-secondary options, career planning tools, and career exploration. Students are able to access resources via the Internet thus giving them accurate, up-to-date information. This accessibility to information and resources has empowered the student to explore post-secondary options like no other time before.

Summary

It is evident in the review of literature that there are many factors which influence the decision of high school students' transitions to post-secondary options and career choices. As has been in the past, students will continue to be influenced by parents, peers, teachers, geography, and even stereotypes and images. The research indicated that many

technical opportunities are overlooked in favor of pursuing a four-year degree because many still feel a four-year college degree is the only way to win (Gray and Herr, 1995).

The literature also suggests that many students are pushed toward a four-year degree, without a clear idea of what the labor market demands, or how to best prepare for jobs that meet their aptitudes and interests. As a result, many students who might have achieved maximum economic benefit and personal satisfaction from a technical career never receive the appropriate training.

As Wisconsin enters the 21st century coping with a labor shortage, felt noticeably in the technical occupations, it is imperative that counselors, parents, and students have accurate and reliable perceptions of all post-secondary options and shed any unrealistic images and stereotypes attached to the technical careers that are shaping the employment of the future. Counselors are faced with a difficult task of balancing their responsibilities and finding time to continue to develop guidance programs that encompass partnerships with other school and community personnel to prepare students for a lifetime of career development and transitions to the technical job market.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine counselor and counselor in-training attitudes and perceptions of the Wisconsin Technical College System and its value as a post-secondary option for high school students. This study used a counselor survey format to assess counselor and counselor in-training attitudes and perceptions.

Subjects

The subjects for this study included 36 practicing high school counselors in the Chippewa Valley Technical College District and 20 counselors in-training from the University of Wisconsin – Stout. The Chippewa Valley Technical College District is made up of eleven counties and serves approximately 271,000 people. The counselors in-training were from the Spring, 2000, University of Wisconsin - Stout Counseling Practicum and Counseling Internship classes and received the survey during the last class of the semester. The practicing high school counselors were mailed the surveys and asked to respond to the survey within five days. The completed surveys were returned to the researcher's home address via stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Counselors and counselors in-training were chosen based on their geographic location in the Chippewa Valley Technical College district. Seventy counselors and counselors in-training were selected. Thirty-six practicing counselors out of fifty responded and twenty out of twenty counselors in-training responded.

Instrument

A two-page survey was designed to identify counselors' attitudes and perceptions about the Wisconsin Technical College System (Appendix A). The survey instrument was designed based on existing research of reasons for students' post-secondary choices and was separated into three parts. Part one of the survey requested general information on the subject's demographics. Part two contained 15 statements about the WTCS and participants were asked to rate their response on a six point Likert scale from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (6). Part three consisted of a section for comments. For purposes of this study Likert scale responses were collapsed. On the scale responses 1 – 3 were considered as disagree and 4 – 6 were considered agree.

Procedures

Prior to the date of administering the instrument, permission was requested and granted from the instructor(s) of the University of Wisconsin - Stout Spring, 2000, Counseling Internship class and the Counseling Practicum class to administer the survey to their students. Written affirmation of voluntary participation and confidentiality was attached to the front of the survey (Appendix A). Surveys were administered in the context of these classes.

Surveys were mailed to practicing counselors in the Chippewa Valley Technical College district. The counselors were informed that participation in the study was voluntary, and there were no consequences for choosing not to participate. To ensure

confidentiality, the participants were instructed not to identify themselves on the survey. Upon completing the survey, the participants were instructed to return the survey in the pre-addressed and stamped envelope.

Data Analysis

Completed survey results were compiled with the assistance of the University of Wisconsin - Stout Academic Computing Center. For the purpose of this study, the 15 "counselor perception statements" were examined to determine counselor and counselor in-training perceptions. The 15 items were examined separately and means and standard deviations were computed for each. Counselor and counselor in-training perceptions were separated and implications and recommendations were made for future counselor professional practice.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Counselors from the Chippewa Valley Technical College District and counselors in-training from the University of Wisconsin - Stout were asked to complete a survey to assess their attitudes and perceptions of the Wisconsin Technical College System. This chapter will present the results of this study in frequency counts, percentages, and means.

For purposes of reporting, counselor and counselor in-training results were group together in this section. The majority of the 56 respondents, 46 (82.1%) had toured one of the Wisconsin Technical Colleges and 10 (17.1%) had not. Of the 46 who had toured, 31 (55.4%) had toured one of the Wisconsin Technical Colleges within the last year and 44 (95.7%) had toured within the last five years.

The top four ways counselors receive information about the Wisconsin Technical College System are through workshops (37.5%), college representatives (37.5%), word of mouth (30.4%), and other (30.4%). The top three written responses provided in the "other" category were marketing materials, friend/relative attending, and a combination of all.

Counselors believe the top four reasons students pursue a four-year degree include parental influence (50%), obtain a high paying job (37.5%), status among friends (21.4%), and other reasons (26.8%). The top three written reasons included in the "other" category were: career requires a four-year degree, more valuable than a two-year degree, and it is

the thing to do. Counselors clearly perceive that parents have a strong influence on a child's post-secondary decision.

Counselors believe the top four reasons students attend a technical college include other (37.5%), to obtain a high paying job (35.7%), a desire to learn (17.9%), and job security (17.9%). In the "other" category, three of the top reasons written on the survey were: shorter time commitment, choice of career program of interest, and students want to start core courses immediately. The results showed that counselors perceive parents to be very influential in impacting a student's decision to attend a four-year college (50.0%) and have little influence on students attending a technical college (8.9%). Also, the information portrays that counselors perceive that attending a technical college is not a "status" symbol for students.

Table 2: COUNSELING GROUP STATISTICS

	Mean	Frequency Agree	Percent Agree	Frequency Disagree	Percent Disagree
TYPE OF STUDENT					
1. The WTCS is for students of the average academic achievement level.	3.23	22	42.5	31	58.5
2. If academically talented students attend a technical college, they are not maximizing their opportunities.	2.07	8	46	14.8	85.2
3. The WTCS is for students of high academic achievement level.	4.34	39	73.6	14	26.4
4. The technical college is a dumping ground for low high school performers.	1.81	5	9.4	48	90.6
5. At-risk students should attend a technical college.	3.69	30	57.7	22	42.3
INFLUENCES ON STUDENTS POST-SECONDARY CHOICE					
6. Students feel pressure to obtain a four-year degree.	4.17	40	74.1	14	25.9
7. Students believe there is a "stigma" attached to attending a technical college.	3.69	26	50	26	50
TECHNICAL COLLEGE IMAGE					
8. The fastest growing segment of the job market is the professional field.	2.56	12	23.1	40	76.9
9. Students graduating from the technical college can earn a beginning salary equivalent to graduates from a university system.	4.68	42	79.2	11	20.8
10. I would encourage my child to attend a technical college.	4.60	43	82.7	9	17.3
11. Students who pursue careers in non-professional high skill occupations will earn more than college graduates in professional ranks.	3.85	34	65.4	18	34.6
12. In jobs, university graduates can replace individuals who have obtained their advanced technical skills through vocational education.	2.58	9	17.3	43	82.7
RECRUITMENT AND MARKETING					

EFFORTS					
13. The technical college effectively recruits high school students.	4.15	37	71.2	15	28.8
14. The WTCS effectively markets its programs of study.	4.20	40	74.1	14	25.9
15. The new partnership between the UW-System and the WTCS will encourage me to send more students to the WTCS.	4.35	38	77.6	11	22.4

As depicted in the results by the means listed in the chart, only one of the means entered the extreme end of a category (strongly agree or strongly disagree). Overall, counselors were somewhat undecided about what 'type' of student should attend a technical college. Counselors felt that students of average academic achievement (3.23) and at-risk students (3.69) are not necessarily the type of student that should attend a technical college. On the other hand, counselors indicated that a technical college might be appropriate for students of high academic achievement (4.34).

Two questions focused on 'influences on a student's post-secondary choice.' Counselors agreed students feel pressure to obtain a four-year degree (4.17) and disagreed that there is a stigma attached to attending a technical college (3.69).

Counselors agreed, when responding to the questions focusing on the 'technical college image,' that they would encourage their child to attend a technical college (4.60), understood that the professional field is not the fastest growing segment of the job market (2.56), and agreed that students graduating from a technical college can earn a beginning salary equivalent to a university graduate (4.68).

Overall, counselors agreed technical colleges effectively recruit high school students (4.15), market programs effectively (4.20), and the new partnership between the UW-System and the WTCS will encourage counselors to refer more students to WTCS (4.35).

Table 3: COUNSELING GROUP STATISTICS
(Sorted by Counselor In-Training vs. Practicing Counselor)

	Counselor Status	Number of Counselors	Mean
TYPE OF STUDENT			
1. The WTCS is for students of the average academic achievement level.	Practicing In-Training	35 18	3.14 3.39
2. If academically talented students attend a technical college, they are not maximizing their opportunities.	Practicing In-Training	36 18	4.31 3.89
3. The WTCS is for students of high academic achievement level.	Practicing In-Training	35 18	4.57 3.89
4. The technical college is a dumping ground for low high school performers.	Practicing In-Training	35 18	1.97 1.50
5. At-risk students should attend a technical college.	Practicing In-Training	34 18	3.68 3.72
INFLUENCES ON STUDENTS POST-SECONDARY CHOICE			
6. Students feel pressure to obtain a four-year degree.	Practicing In-Training	36 18	4.31 3.89
7. Students believe there is a "stigma" attached to attending a technical college.	Practicing In-Training	34 18	3.85 3.39
TECHNICAL COLLEGE IMAGE			
8. The fastest growing segment of the job market is the professional field.	Practicing In-Training	35 17	2.54 2.59
9. Students graduating from the technical college can earn a beginning salary equivalent to graduates from a university system.	Practicing In-Training	35 18	4.83 4.39
10. I would encourage my child to attend a technical college.	Practicing In-Training	34 18	4.62 4.56
11. Students who pursue careers in non-professional high skill occupations will earn more than college graduates in professional ranks.	Practicing In-Training	34 18	3.97 3.61
RECRUITMENT AND MARKETING EFFORTS			
12. The technical college effectively recruits high school students.	Practicing	34	4.26

	In-Training	18	3.94
13. The WTCS effectively markets its programs of study.	Practicing	36	4.31
	In-Training	18	4.00
14. The new partnership between the UW-System and the WTCS will encourage me to send more students to the WTCS.	Practicing	33	4.39
	In-Training	16	4.25
15. In jobs, university graduates can replace individuals who have obtained their advanced technical skills through vocational education.	Practicing	34	2.76
	In-Training	18	2.22

The results in Table 3 indicate that the practicing counselors and the counselors in-training vary in their responses. Practicing counselors and counselors in-training agreed that the type of student to attend a technical college would include students of average academic achievement level and at-risk students. However, practicing counselors and counselors in-training disagreed 'that the WTCS is for students of high academic achievement levels' with practicing counselors agreeing (4.57) and counselors in-training disagreeing (3.89). Practicing counselors also agreed (4.31) that if 'academically talented students attend a technical college, they are not maximizing their opportunities' and counselors in-training disagreed (3.89). Practicing counselors agreed (4.31) 'students feel pressure to obtain a four-year degree' while counselors in-training disagreed (3.89).

Practicing counselors and counselors in-training were in agreement with all of the statements that reflected the technical college image. The final discrepancy resulted in response to 'the technical college effectively recruits high school students'

with practicing counselors agreeing (4.26) and counselors in-training disagreeing (3.94).

Worth noting, both practicing counselors and counselors in-training disagreed with the statement, 'Students believe there is a stigma attached to attending a technical college' with 3.85 and 3.39 respectively.

The final section of the survey included an area where additional comments and concerns about the Wisconsin Technical College System were welcomed from the respondents. Many respondents did write some helpful insights and some appeared to misinterpret the 15 statements on the survey as reflections of the researchers opinion – which they were not. A list of the comments is presented below:

> *"Every situation is different, but I feel Tech Schools are a great place to further one's education."*
>
> *"Like many of us, you seem to have worded your questions to get the answers you want. Promotion of technical colleges has dropped since tech counselors no longer work with the high school students."*
>
> *"Some statements are ambiguous. Hard to commit to either end of the scale. Tech School is for everyone!"*
>
> *I feel that a technical degree is more appropriate for some students based on their goals and resources. Some students want a quick degree with a specific job in mind."*
>
> *"There is a stigma attached to attending the technical college."*
>
> *"It is a changing world out there!"*

"For many of these questions, the answer is maybe, sometimes, or it depends. There are few absolutes."

"There continues to be many myths floating around about tech school opportunities and a continued push toward a four-year degree. At the same time, there are some "highly skilled" tech programs that do not provide "high wages."

"Much depends on the program. Students should attend the best school for their career choice."

"Ever since CVTC's marketing change, recruiting has gotten worse."

"You did not include an age range that includes age 21 –24. Most of us just graduating from the program are in that age bracket."

"I was truly undecided on a lot of the questions because it truly depends on what program a student goes into. Some tech programs are great and others are not.

The attitudes and perceptions of the WTCS are varied and gray. It appears that counselors will vary considerably in their attitudes and perceptions of the Wisconsin Technical College System and the results of the study indicate a wide array of responses possibly due to the changing economic environment, the changing definition of the education needed to be successful in today's labor market, and the stigmas attached to technical education.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine counselor and counselor in-training attitudes and perceptions of the Wisconsin Technical College System and its value as a post-secondary option. It is important to study counselors' attitudes and perceptions of the WTCS to gain insight into helping students find a good fit between their interests and goals and the training and job opportunities available in the labor market. High school students require more timely and practical information on technical careers, more hands-on experiences with the technology that drives the occupations, and an increased awareness about the training required to have a successful technical career.

Counselors appear to have a fairly strong insight into the WTCS. However, there is a long way to go to continue to eliminate the stereotypes and negative images that have plagued the technical college in recent years. This was evident in the mean scores calculated on the 15 statements.

If counselors perceive the WTCS as a fairly viable choice for post-secondary education, why do so many students continue to pursue a four-year degree in a job market that needs more skilled workers (Gray and Herr, 1995)? According to the respondents, the greatest influence for students pursuing a four-year degree was parental influence (50.0%). More research needs to be done to find the answer to that question and determine the accuracy of parents' perceptions of the WTCS. Pursuing a baccalaureate degree is a sound

post-secondary plan for some graduates, but not for all. It is time to stop pretending that the four-year degree is the only way to win. There are many reasons to attend a four-year college. The parent(s) and the student must make the decision, but they need to know all the facts and then make an informed decision as to the best opportunity for success for their child.

Recommendations for Further Study

Further research needs to be done to determine why there are still such large discrepancies in the percentage of students who pursue a four-year degree versus the percentage of students who pursue a technical education despite the fact that only 30% of the jobs are in the professional area (Gray and Herr, 1995).

This study raised new questions for further research. This study showed that generally, counselors felt the WTCS is a viable post-secondary option. Further research is needed to identify student and parent perceptions of technical careers and the WTCS as a post-secondary option. This would help the WTCS gain an understanding of the education and marketing it needs to pursue to change the image of the WTCS so that students have greater access to post-secondary options.

The review of literature portrayed the WTCS of today in a very positive light and the WTCS of the past as a lesser than alternative than the four-year university. Society still has varying attitudes and beliefs about success and which type of post-secondary education will lead to success. The only way to determine if society has made progress in

eliminating the stereotypes that surround technical education is to conduct additional research. Do university leaders, parents and the citizens of Wisconsin embrace a broader definition of success, one which values highly the contribution made by technical workers to the economy and quality of life in Wisconsin? Education is the future and we must continue to help students become informed about post-secondary options and build ways for them to connect to the type of post-secondary training that best suits their goals and aspirations.

Appendix A

Survey

Dear Counselor / Counselor in Training:

My name is Denise Ocker and I am a graduate student in the Guidance and Counseling Program at the University of Wisconsin – Stout, and a Chippewa Valley Technical College Student Services Counselor, researching counselor's perceptions and attitudes of the Wisconsin Technical College System.

Please consider completing the enclosed questionnaire. Your response will be collected in anonymity. The information will be used to better understand counselor's perceptions of the Wisconsin Technical College System as a post-secondary option for students.

Questions or concerns about participation can be addressed to myself or Dr. Ted Knous, Chair, University of Wisconsin - Stout Institutional Review board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 HH, University of Wisconsin - Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751. Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Denise Ocker

Denise Ocker

Survey to Assess Counselors Perceptions and Attitudes of the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS)

The following survey was designed to identify your perceptions about the Wisconsin Technical College System. Your participation is voluntary and your responses are considered in anonymity. Please **do not** write your name on the questionnaire. As you read through the questionnaire, please answer the questions as **truthfully** and **thoughtfully** as possible

Directions: Please check one answer that best applies to you. Enter comments in spaces provided.

1. Please indicate which of the following represents your status:

_____ Middle School Counselor
_____ High School Counselor
_____ K-12 School Counselor
_____ Counselor in Training
_____ Other (please specify)
_____

2. Gender _____ Female _____ Male

3. **Age** _____ 25 – 30 _____ 31 – 40 _____ 41 – 50 _____ Over 50

4. Have you ever worked in the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS)?

_____ Yes _____ No **If yes, how many years?** _____

***5.* Have you ever toured one of the Wisconsin Technical Colleges?**

_____ Yes _____ No **If yes, when was the last time?**

_____ 0 – 1 year ago _____ 4 – 5 years ago _____ 8 – 10 years ago
_____ 2 – 3 years ago _____ 6 – 7 years ago _____ over 10 years ago

8. What has been your major source of information about the Wisconsin Technical College System?

_____ Workshops _____ Inservice _____ Word of Mouth
_____ College Representative _____ Media _____ Colleagues
_____ Other (please specify)
_____

9. In your professional opinion, what is the main reason students pursue a four-year degree?

_____ Desire to learn _____ Parental Influence _____ Job Security
_____ Status among friends _____ To obtain a high paying job
_____ Other (please specify)
_____

10. **In your professional opinion, what is the main reason students attend a technical college?**

_____ Desire to learn _____ Parental Influence _____ Job Security
_____ Status among friends _____ To obtain a high paying job
_____ Other (please specify)
_____

Please continue on the other side.

Using the scale below, please indicate your response to the following statements by placing a checkmark (√) in the column that best describes your opinion.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE 1	2	3	4	5	STRONGLY AGREE 6
1. The WTCS is for students of the average academic achievement level.						
2. Students feel pressure to obtain a four-year degree.						
3. If academically talented students attend a technical college, they are not maximizing their opportunities.						
4. The fastest growing segment of the job market is the professional field.						
5. Students believe there is a "stigma" attached to attending a technical college.						
6. Students graduating from the technical college can earn a beginning salary equivalent to graduates from a university system.						
7. The technical college effectively recruits high school students.						
8. The WTCS is for students of high academic achievement level.						
9. The technical college is a dumping ground for low high school performers.						
10. I would encourage my child to attend a technical college.						
11. The new partnership between the UW-System and the WTCS will encourage me to send more students to the WTCS.						
12. At-risk students should attend a technical college.						
13. The WTCS effectively markets its programs of study.						
14. Students who pursue careers in non-professional high skill occupations will earn more than college graduates in professional ranks.						
15. In jobs, university graduates can replace individuals who have obtained their advanced technical skills through vocational education.						

Comments:

_____.

Thank you for completing and returning the questionnaire by 12, 2000. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me at the following address and phone number: **Denise Ocker, 1615 Raedel Road, Eau Claire, Wisconsin 54703, (715) 831-9429.**

If you are unable to complete this questionnaire, please return to the above address. Thank you again for your time and information.

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